



newsletter



Supporting and Mentoring in Learning and Education

1 April 2010

Research findings show SMILE has significant positive impact

The SMILE project has reached the half-way stage and the research team are pleased to announce the emerging findings from the project to date. We have carried out a total of 20 interviews so far: 7 volunteers (1 befriender and 6 mentors), 10 young people (2 befriendees and 8 mentees) as well as the volunteer coordinators in each of the three regions.

Evidence from the research to date highlights that the relationships that have developed between volunteers and young people in SMILE have had a significant positive impact on the lives of the young people in three main areas: accessing an educational placement; social development and English language skills.

"Finding college was very important for me and I didn't have anyone to help me; I couldn't find college on my own."

Boy mentee, Greater London

"My mentor helped me first of all, she helped me with my language; she taught me how to read and write, to learn English."

Boy mentee, Yorkshire and Humberside

Volunteers also had very positive things to say about their experiences, with all feeling they had gained something from working with SMILE, whether tangible such as time management skills, knowledge to work with vulnerable young people or the more intangible gains of gaining an insight into other people's lives and the experiences of refugee and asylum seeking young people in the UK.

Whilst volunteers played a pivotal role in enabling young people to access education, research findings highlighted that refugee and asylum seeking young people are still facing considerable barriers in accessing a placement. Key problems relate to age dispute, waiting times for FE colleges – particularly causing difficulty for young people who arrived after the start of the academic year and confusion over educational entitlement, with colleges not always being aware of the rights of asylum seeking young people.

To date, findings would suggest that the project aspirations and goals are in line with outcomes; we will continue to monitor and evaluate and will develop good practice guidelines. Evidence from both volunteers and young people points to the positive contribution this form of one to one support can have on the lives of the young people, particularly isolated separated children.

"People, many people in my situation, may be in need and needing support, and so from my own experience I got support and help, I would recommend to other people as well the benefit of [SMILE project]"

Boy mentee, West Midlands

Research findings were disseminated at the three SMILE seminars held in Birmingham, London, and Leeds. The full research findings to have emerged so far are outlined in a briefings paper which you can access soon on the [SMILE website](#).

The research team will continue to interview those involved in SMILE and will be producing a final report on the project at the end of the project. Watch this space!

SMILE Birmingham launches homework club

After its success in Leeds, a homework club for 14-18 year olds has now been set up in Birmingham. The club is run in partnership with Birmingham University STAR (Student Action for Refugees) and aims to provide young people with a quiet place to study with volunteers on hand to assist with homework. It is also somewhere that young people who are waiting for school or college places can attend in order to access English support and educational games in the meantime.

The first few sessions have been met with huge enthusiasm from volunteers and young people alike. One young person said: "The homework club means a lot to me because I can learn English, solve my homework and there is a great opportunity to meet new people."

Each session is run by three STAR volunteers, with support from the SMILE coordinator, and uses an interactive approach. As another young person said: "It is a friendly class, it is like everyone is the teacher."

The STAR volunteers have done an excellent job running the sessions and can see that their hard work is already paying off, as one volunteer remarked, "I think the homework club is enabling us to make a real difference in the local community and it's obvious that those two hours each week are really valuable to everyone involved."

London Youth Activities

Since the last newsletter we have organised lots of educational and

SMILE London

Our London SMILE volunteers have been very busy since our last newsletter. We currently have fifteen active befriending and mentoring relationships supporting young people aged between 10 and 17 years old.

Our befrienders have continued to support young people in school and college, and have helped young people learn English, access extra support in school, and take part in extra curricular activities such as chess clubs and football clubs. Our mentors on the other hand have supported a number of young people to access education over the past few months.

Refugee Week – Simple Acts Campaign: Schools competition

Simple Acts is about inspiring people to use small, everyday actions to change the perception of refugees. In 2009 more than 7000 people recorded their actions on our website.

This year we are calling on schools to take part in our national Simple Acts Competition. We are looking for a picture of the UK's best pro-refugee banner. With this banner we would like your students to tell us how they would like to make refugees more welcome. This is a great opportunity to raise the profile of your school. Engage your students actively in thinking about a very pressing issue that is all around us.

The deadline for entries is 20 May 2010. For more information on how to take part, please visit the [Simple Acts website](#) or get in touch with us via info@refugeeweek.org.uk.



SIMPLE ACTS

leisure activities for young people. These have included; a Creative Writing Workshop at Somerset House, led by their writer in residence Romesh Gunesequera; a trip to Riley's Pool Hall for all the budding pool sharks; art workshops; photography workshops; and ice skating at Canary Wharf and Somerset House. We have also continued to host the Soundmix music classes and our Tuesday Social Evening is as popular as ever.



SMILE helps child refugees to enjoy and achieve in education through mentoring, befriending and school talks.

SMILE is a Refugee Council project, funded by the Department of Children, Families and Schools.

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